

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 TRSE-00 EB-07 OMB-01 /063 W

-----180942Z 055606 /14

R 180215Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7264

INFO AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, MY

SUBJECT: MORE ON SUBJECT OF POSSIBLE EARLY ELECTIONS AND UMNO
ANNIVERSARY OBSERVANCES

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 3021

B. KUALA LUMPUR 3022

1. SUMMARY: PRIME MINISTER STATES HE HAS YET TO DECIDE WHEN TO CALL
NEXT

GENERAL ELECTIONS. RELIABLE JOURNALIST, WHO IS PERCEPTIVE OBSERVER OF
LOCAL POLITICAL SCENE, SHARES OUR ASSESSMENT ELECTIONS UNLIKELY UNTIL
SOMETIME NEXT YEAR, KEY DETERMINANTS, HE FEELS, BEING PREDICTED STATE
OF

THE NATIONAL ECONOMY AND STRATEGIC DECISION WHETHER TO HOLD ELECTIONS
BEFORE OR AFTER MID-1978 UMNO PARTY ELECTIONS. HE ALSO CONTENTS UMNO
ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS WERE INDEED THERAPEUTIC FOR PARTY UNITY AND
REMARKABLE FOR ABSENCE OF MENTION OF LATE PRIME MINISTER TUN ABDUL
RAZAK'S NAME DURING PROCEEDINGS. END SUMMARY.

2. ELECTIONS. DESPITE HEADLINES PROCLAIMING "HUSSEIN CLEARS THE AIR
ON

POLLS, "PRIME MINISTER'S REMARKS AT MAY 15 NATIONAL FRONT (NF)

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MEETING

IN MALACCA ON POSSIBLE EARLY ELECTIONS OFFERED NO DEFINITIVE INSIGHTS
INTO HIS THINKING ON THE MATTER. ACCORDING TO PRESS
QUOTES, HUSSEIN SAID HE HAD NOT REPEAT NOT DECIDED WHEN
TO SET DATE FOR NEW ELECTIONS. ELABORATING RATHER
UNCONVINCINGLY, HE STATED THAT MATTER "HAS NOT CROSSED OUR
MINDS," AS THE NF'S MANDATE TO RULE WILL NOT EXPIRE UNTIL

AUGUST 23, 1979, (BY WHICH, SINCE HE IS NOT GIVEN TO DISSIMULATION, WE BELIEVE HE MEANT THAT HE HAS NOT CONSIDERED SCHEDULING AN ELECTION THIS YEAR, NOT THAT HE HAS FAILED TO STUDY THE WHOLE QUESTION OF THE TIMING OF ELECTIONS).

3. A LONG-TIME AND WELL-INFORMED JOURNALIST HAS TOLD US THAT HUSSEIN'S DECISION ON TIMING WILL BE DETERMINED LARGELY BY: (A) HIS PERCEPTION OF THE COMPARATIVE BENEFITS OF HOLDING ELECTIONS BEFORE OR AFTER THE 1978 UNNO PARTY ELECTIONS, AND (B) PROJECTIONS OF THE FUTURE STATE OF THE ECONOMY. WITH REGARD TO (A), HUSSEIN MUST DECIDE WHETHER HE WANTS TO MAINTAIN HIS PRESENT TEAM OR ALLOW THE PARTY TO INFLUENCE HIS CHOICE OF NEW TEAM MEMBERS. IF HELD BEFORE THE UMNO ELECTIONS, A GENERAL ELECTION WOULD TEND TO RENEW THE MANDATE GIVEN TO THE PRESENT CABINET LEADERSHIP SINCE MOST OF THEM ARE IN SAFE CONSTITUENCIES. IF SCHEDULED AFTER THE 1978 UMNO ELECTIONS, THEN HUSSEIN WOULD HAVE TO ACCOMMODATE A CHANGED SLATE SINCE IN THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE OLDER AND YOUNGER GENERATIONS OF THE PARTY A CERTAIN NUMBER OF YOUNGER POLITICIANS AND THEIR OLDER SURROGATES ARE LIKELY TO WIN PARTY ENDORSEMENT TO REPLACE SOME OF THE OLD FACES. WITH REGARD TO (B), EXTENDED DROUGHT WHICH HAS AFFECTED THE POLITICALLY SENSITIVE RURAL MALAY AREAS OF KEDAH, UPPER PERAK AND PERLIS WOULD IN ITSELF SEEM TO PRECLUDE ELECTIONS IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

4. WHICHEVER HE CHOOSES, OUR SOURCE NOTED, HUSSEIN MUST PREPARE THE PARTY RANK-AND-FILE TO LOSE MORE SEATS THAN IN THE 1974 ELECTIONS BECAUSE CONDITIONS ARE DIFFERENT. LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ONE CHANGE IS THE ABSENCE OF MUSTAPHA IN SABAH WHERE THE STATE GOVERNMENT CAN NO LONGER GUARANTEE AN ABSOLUTE SWEEP OF EVERY SEAT SIMPLY BY LOCKING UP OPPOSITION CANDIDATES OR PREVENTING THEM FROM REGISTERING. ANOTHER IS WHAT OUR SOURCE VIEWS AS THE STRONG CHALLENGE TO DR. LIM CHEONG EU IN PENANG, AND THE POSSIBLE WEAKENING OR ELIMINATION OF THE GERAKAN PARTY AS A RESULT OF LIM'S SLIPPING POPULARITY. WHATEVER CHANGES OCCUR, HOWEVER, OUR SOURCE AGREES THAT THERE IS NO REAL THREAT TO NATIONAL FRONT AND UMNO DOMINATION OF THE PARLIAMENT AND, EVEN IF HUSSEIN SHOULD ELECT TO ACCEPT SOME PARTY-INSPIRED CHANGES IN HIS CABINET, MAJOR CHANGES OF GOVERNMENT POLICY ARE EXTREMELY REMOTE.

5. UMNO 31ST ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATIONS. OUR SOURCE CONTENTED THAT HUSSEIN ONN HAD STRENGTHENED HIS LEADERSHIP IN THE PARTY BY HONORING EX-PM TUNKU ABDUL RAHMAN AT THE MAY 11 MEETING. THIS MOVE HAD WON OVER THE TUNKU TO HUSSEIN'S CAMP, THEREBY DIMINISHING CAPABILITIES OF

OTHER POWER CENTERS IN THE PARTY WHO HAD COUNTED ON THE TUNKU'S SUPPORT FOR THEIR INTRAPARTY MANEUVERING. HE ALSO VIEWS THE ABSENCE OF ANY REFERENCE TO LATE PRIME MINISTER RAZAK AS MARKING THE FORMAL PASSING OF THE RAZAK ERA; THE LATE PM THUS MAY BE JUST THE SCAPEGOAT THE PARTY REQUIRES TO PATCH OVER ITS FEUDS, REPLACING THE NOW "REHABILITATED" TUNKU (WHO RAZAK HAD TREATED SHABBILY) AS A "NON-PERSON" IN UMNO. ADDITIONALLY, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER MAHATHIR MOHAMED'S CONSPICUOUS ABSENCE FROM THE ANNIVERSARY PROCEEDINGS--HE WAS ON AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO SABAH--COST MAHATHIR IN TERMS OF NOT BEING ASSOCIATED WITH THE MEETING'S UNITY SPIRIT, OUR CONTACT ADDED. (COMMENT: MAHATHIR REMAINS SUSPECT IN THE EYES OF SOME PARTY LOYALISTS FOR HIS ATTACKS ON THE TUNKU AFTER THE 1969 RIOTS FOR WHICH HE WAS EXPELLED FROM UMNO FOR GROSS BREACHES OF PARTY DISCIPLINE, ALTHOUGH HE WAS READMITTED THREE YEARS LATER.) LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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Message Attributes

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